

14. SPARROW 'HELPING' NESTING BULBULS

In July 1978, Mrs. Perin Jejeebhoy showed me a partly-built nest of the Redwhiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) which was being built in her garden just off Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay, and referred to a female sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) being associated with the work. This seemed so extraordinary that I asked her to keep written notes of all that she saw and the following, which she commenced to write after the first 2 or 3 days appear to be worth recording:—

- "22 July 1978—A pair was noticed building in a small bush 4' high in my garden, very close to the house. A hen house sparrow brought nesting material and appeared to be trying to help.
- 23 July —Both bulbuls continued to build. The sparrow hung around.
- 24 July —Building continued with sparrow attendant in building the same nest. The bulbuls did not appear to appreciate the assistance.
- 25 July —As above, nest empty at 4 p.m.
- 26 July —No birds nearby, but c/1 at 6.30 p.m. None on nest at 9-30 p.m.
- 27 July —7-30 a.m. both bulbuls nearby. One settled on nest and when she flew off at about 8 a.m., there were 2 eggs. One sat on the nest after 11 a.m. for short irregular periods, making short flights, not far from nest.
- 28 July —More time spent on nest. At noon c/3. 5-15 p.m. no trace of either bird and no singing heard.
- 29 July —Bulbul(s) sitting off and on, but noticed the sparrow occupying the nest when bulbul absent.
- 30 July —Opening the grill door near the nest disturbed the birds, so nothing was done till 9-30 a.m. When opened at 9-30 a.m., the sparrow flew off the nest and

there was no trace of the bulbuls.

"For the next 10 days, the nest appeared to be irregularly and half-heartedly attended during the daytime and we were beginning to worry about the fate of the eggs. The sparrow was often seen visiting the nest when the bulbuls were absent.

"On 10th August, however, there were two naked chicks in the nest. Both parents fed them on worms and berries, and also on red flowers from *Ixora* bushes round the garden.

"The nest was in a precarious condition on the 13th but our servant Carlos, who has a natural love and interest in birds and animals, fixed it securely with a wire.

"On the 14th, crows showed interest in the chicks and though the parents were in a dither, they made no attempt to attack them. On 18th evening, the chicks had clambered on to the edge of the nest and they had left the nest at 7-30 a.m. on the following morning. They were seen in the garden a couple of hours later, when though flying well, they were still fed by the parents. They were seen again on the 20th and then moved away.

"Assuming that incubation commenced after the laying of the full clutch (28th), the eggs hatched after 13 days and the chicks left the nest after 9 days.

"A happy ending which we hope will happen again next season."

The same or another pair have nested in another bush just 5 yards away and I have placed plastic rings upon the feet of 3 naked young in the nest today.

The ringing of a few birds which are left in the city limits would perhaps permit a closer examination of their social and other habits.